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# AN EX-AMBASSADOR SAYS U.S. ORDERED AID FOR CONTRAS

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PHOENIX, May 2 — Lewis A. Tambo, who resigned as United States Ambassador to Costa Rica in January amid reports that he and his staff had improperly assisted the Nicaraguan rebels, said today that all his actions were taken on specific orders from senior Government officials in Washington.

"Now the people who gave us the orders are trying to paint us as running amok," said Mr. Tambo, a professor of history at Arizona State University, in his first interview on the subject since leaving office. "It's insane."

Officials at the Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department have repeatedly denied having anything to do with the covert and apparently illegal program to aid the Nicaraguan rebels in 1985 and 1986. The Administration has said the program was wholly directed by Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North, the former National Security Council aide.

## Orders From a Group

Mr. Tambo said his orders came from the Restricted Interagency Group, an informal organization of Government officials who helped set contra policy.

He said that many officials took part in some meetings of the group but that the three key officers, and the men who gave him his orders, were Colonel North; Alan D. Fiers, who helped make policy as head of the C.I.A. Central American Task Force, and Elliott Abrams, the group's chairman, an Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America and Mr. Tambo's immediate supervisor. Spokesmen for Mr. Abrams and the C.I.A. denied the allegations.

During most of 1985 and 1986, Federal law prohibited Government involvement in military aid to the rebels, known as contras. In response to Mr. Tambo's statements, spokesmen at both the C.I.A. and the State Department denied that the officials involved had acted improperly.

## Accusations, Denials

Accusations and denials have surrounded the contra program since late 1981, when the United States first took an interest in the rebel movement. Even then, when the rebels numbered only about 500, senior American officials argued about what support for the contras was intended to accomplish.

Mr. Tambo spoke about the contra operation as officials in Washington prepared for hearings on the Iran-contra arms affair, which are scheduled to begin Tuesday before Senate and House investigating committees.

Federal law-enforcement officials have said the special prosecutor in the case may indict "high Government of-

ficials" on conspiracy charges for violating legal restrictions on aid to the contras.

Mr. Tambo said officials in Washington directed him and the chief of the C.I.A. station in Costa Rica to give logistical help to the contras and to the Americans who were flying weapons and other supplies to the rebels.

He said he never knew with certainty what was on the flights. "I never saw a manifest," he said, but "one could certainly speculate" that they included military supplies.

## Group Set Contra Policy

Any doubt on that question ended in October, when one of the planes in the effort that Mr. Tambo had been asked to help was shot down inside Nicaragua. It was loaded with munitions.

Mr. Tambo said he did not know who else in Government, if anyone, may have known of the activities.

Mr. Tambo, still an ardent contra supporter and a strong conservative whose living room is dominated by framed portraits of him with President Reagan and Vice President Bush, declined to attach specific names to specific orders. But he insisted that the orders came from "the Rig," as the group, which still exists, is called, and not just from Colonel North.

Mr. Tambo said these men directed him to help with the opening of a new contra offensive on Nicaragua's southern border with Costa Rica. By last September, he said, he and his staff had succeeded in building a "southern front" of between 1,600 and 2,800 men.

Then, he said, the Restricted Interagency Group's officers asked him to persuade the rebels on the southern front to join forces with the contras based in Honduras, an idea Mr. Tambo said he resisted because he did not think the main contra elements would keep the southern forces well supplied.

Mr. Abrams declined to comment directly on Mr. Tambo's account, but a spokesman for him denied the allegations. "The Rig did not give instructions," the spokesman said. "To say the Rig decided that the ambassador in any country should give any kind of support to the contras — that just didn't happen."

In response to attempts to seek comment from Mr. Fiers, a C.I.A. spokesman denied that "agency officers authorized any C.I.A. activities contrary to" the policy of "avoiding agency involvement with the private benefactor network."

Mr. Tambo said that when he arrived in Costa Rica in July 1985, Mr. Abrams and the other officers of the Restricted

Interagency Group asked him to persuade the Government to allow contra supply pilots to use a secret 1.2-mile-long airstrip that Colonel North's operatives had built just south of the Nicaraguan border.

## Airstrip Was Closed Down

Mr. Tambo said Costa Rica allowed use of the airstrip for refueling but not for delivering supplies. But when a new administration came into office last year, the new President, Oscar Arias Sánchez, closed the airstrip, despite pleas from Mr. Tambo, he said.

Last year, Mr. Tambo said, the officers of the Restricted Interagency Group gave approval when the C.I.A. station chief for Costa Rica, known by the pseudonym Tomás Castillo, asked whether he should supply intelligence and specific logistical assistance to the contras. The rebels then passed the information to the private American pilots who used the airstrip to drop weapons and other supplies to the "southern front."

"A couple of times we did ask, 'Is this O.K.?' and they said, 'Yeah, go ahead,'" Mr. Tambo said. That included one occasion when Mr. Castillo asked whether he should supply intelligence information on Sandinista troop locations so the pilots could avoid them when dropping supplies.

"I am terribly afraid they may now have forgotten" giving that approval, Mr. Tambo said. "These guys are trying to save their jobs."

## 'A Triumvirate'

Asked specifically whom he was referring to, he said: "The Rig: Abrams, the guy across the river" — Mr. Fiers, in C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Va. — "and North."

Mr. Tambo said he did not question the legality of what he and his staff were being asked to do.

"It was up to the Rig to tell us what the margins were," he said. "It was complicated, and how were we supposed to know. We didn't have a legal staff at the embassy. If orders came from Washington, I assumed they were legal."

The C.I.A. disciplined Mr. Castillo for his involvement with the contras. Investigators who have interviewed Mr. Castillo said he was angry about his treatment. He has not been available for interviews with the press.

Mr. Tambo called it "absolutely outrageous to fry lower-level officers who were carrying out orders."

Mr. Tambo said he had told the same story to the Presidential commission headed by former Senator John Tower, to F.B.I. officers working for the special prosecutor, and to investigators from the Congressional committees. Some of Mr. Tambo's account appeared in the Tower commission report.

Just after the contra supply plane crashed in Nicaragua in October, Mr. Abrams was asked if the Government had any connection to the contra supply program. He said: "I deny it. The intelligence committees have kept looking at it and looking at it. They have never found anything. There's a reason for that. It's because this is not factual."